Miracle Reports and the Argument from Analogy

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Traditionally, scholars used the argument from historical analogy to deny the historical reliability of extraordinary miracle claims in the Gospels, claims such as visible healings, instant cures of blindness or inability to walk, resuscitations from death, and nature miracles. In view of a wide body of global reports available today, the analogy argument instead supports the historical plausibility of eyewitness reports of these experiences.

Key Words: miracle reports, miracle stories, argument from analogy, blind, blindness, raising the dead, nature miracles, Blumhardt, Bultmann

Potential modern analogies for miracle reports in the Gospels may be employed in various ways, but the focus here is to challenge the conventional argument from analogy used against the historical reliability of the ancient claims. The ancient sources about Jesus unanimously support these claims, and modern analogies allow us to treat this evidence as credible, in contrast to the more skeptical approach of scholars such as Strauss and Bultmann. Many experiences have been significant enough to convince those not starting with Christian assumptions; others have included visible physical changes and the sorts of dramatic experiences sometimes reported in the Gospels that are not easily explained in purely psychosomatic terms (including resuscitations and nature miracles).

Although these analogies prove neither the ancient accounts nor that divine activity stands behind them, they should remove the a priori

prejudice that the Gospel traditions about healings and nature miracles cannot ultimately reflect genuine eyewitness experience.

**Potential Contributions of Analogies**

Given limited space, this article cannot address the philosophic and theological question whether we should interpret some miracle claims as genuinely divine or superhuman action. Although from a theistic framework many of the examples in this article would be viewed as miraculous, historically focused scholars debate the extent to which this question may be addressed within a purely historiographic framework. I thus address only briefly, and confine primarily to the third point of this introductory section, possible implications of this research for philosophic and theological exploration.

Here, I offer instead a very modest challenge to a major traditional argument against the historical reliability of biblical miracle accounts, namely, the argument from analogy. People today, and presumably also in antiquity, have extraordinary experiences analogous to the most-often-dismissed experiences reported in the Gospels and Acts, however we explain the causes of those experiences. By "analogous," I refer to the criterion that has often been used to dismiss as genuine experiences biblical accounts of miracles: experiences such as sudden healings of blindness or raisings from the dead do not occur and therefore have never occurred.

This challenge may contribute to biblical studies in several ways. First, and the area on which this article focuses: the challenge calls into question


4 That the argument is modest must be emphasized, because modern experiences do not demonstrate the authenticity of ancient analogues, they do, however, refute the argument, based on the alleged modern nonoccurrence of these experiences, against ancient analogues. Although modest, my argument remains necessary because of the influence of the argument it counters
the assumption of some scholars that the most dramatic healings reported
in the Gospels must reflect late, legendary accretions rather than allowing
that much of this material could be genuine information ultimately derived
from eyewitnesses.

Traditionally, writers used the argument from historical analogy
against the credibility of many early Christian healing claims; more re-
cently, however, Gerd Theissen and others have shown that the argument
from analogy actually suggests the contrary. Against some traditional
Western critical assumptions, millions of eyewitnesses do offer claims com-
parable to those in the Gospels, however we evaluate them. If these claims
can be credibly offered in the 21st century, we lack reason to assume that
witnesses could not have offered them in the 1st.

Second, those interested in global readings, including myself, may
learn from the way that many Christians in the Majority World read these
accounts. As Yale's Lamin Sanneh points out, through the Majority World
western culture "can encounter . . . the gospel as it is being embraced by
societies that had not been shaped by the Enlightenment" and are thus
closer to the milieu of earliest Christianity. In contrast to our typical
Western penchant for allegorizing the accounts for exclusively spiritual
meanings or viewing them as embarrassments, many Christians globally
find in these accounts encouragement for faith and sometimes even models
for ministry.

One need not treat these readings as normative to recognize where
they challenge our own exegetical blind spots. As to which approach may
be closer to the setting of earliest Christianity, we might consider how tes-
timonies functioned elsewhere in antiquity. Surely healing claims posted
in Asclepius's sanctuaries, for example, were not designed solely to satisfy
historical interest; instead they invited trust in the god's power.

5 E.g., Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide
3-9 (here, p 6), David A deSilva, "The Meaning of the New Testament and the Skandalon of
World Constructions," EcQ 64 (1992) 3–21 (here, pp 16–17). Some late 19th- and early 20th-
century thinkers already made similar observations, see Robert Bruce Mullin, Miracles and the

6 This interest has birthed a range of scholarship today, from within IRB itself, see, e.g.,
the contributions in Craig S. Keener and Daniel Carroll R., eds., Global Voices: Readings from the

7 Lamin Sanneh, Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West (Grand Rap-
ids: Eerdmans, 2003) 26

8 I certainly recognize that the Gospel writers themselves also apply lessons from Je-
sus's healings to wider aspects of his mission (see, e.g., Mark 2.10, 17, Matt 8.17, Craig S
273, 290–91, 298). But denying their physical dimension essentially allegorizes the narratives

Oxford University Press, 2002) 122–31

10 On these sanctuaries, see, e.g., my Acts: An Exegetical Commentary (4 vols., Grand
und antike Therapieformen," in Kompendium der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen, vol 1 Die
Wunder Jesu (ed. Ruben Zimmermann, Munich: Gutersloh, 2013) 79–82
Third, those interested in reading the accounts as Scripture may explore the theological dimension of such claims. We may discuss historical analogies without debating their causation: in fact, psychoimmunology shows that attitudes can affect recovery; many other recoveries reflect misdiagnosis, fraud, or various natural causes. Nevertheless, if one does not a priori exclude theistic explanations—that is, if one does not presuppose atheism or deism—philosophers often find theistic explanations compatible with other explanations and sometimes more compelling than the alternatives. Much of the common modern academic assumption that miracles are impossible rests on David Hume’s essay On Miracles, the cogency of which is often challenged today among philosophers. Philosophic theologians and philosophers of religion might use some of the following reports to challenge Hume’s starting assumption that credible eyewitnesses do not report miracles, further weakening the traditional argument against miracles.

This article’s focus, however, is the first point. I address here primarily the question of historical analogy rather than the metahistorical question of explanations, valuable as that quest may be. Historians often confront healing claims, whether or not they wade into the area of extrabiological explanations. Thus, Yale historian Ramsay MacMullen emphasizes that, “to doubt [witnesses’] account of what they saw—to doubt that [the West African prophet William Wadé] Harris, or any saint, or Jesus himself” performed miracles, is theological interpretation, “good or bad.” With the healings attributed to Jesus and early Christians, MacMullen and other scholars have compared healing claims surrounding more recent figures.


Analogies take us only so far in terms of historical inquiry, given the idiosyncrasies of distinct historical figures, but they do support the plausibility of the other evidence we have about Jesus as a healer.

**Ancient Sources about Jesus**

Healing and exorcism accounts comprise perhaps one-third of Mark's Gospel, which the majority of scholars today consider the earliest extant Gospel, yet they are also a major reason for many traditional critics suspecting the reliability of much of the gospel tradition. Despite a range of explanations for the experiences, however, most historical-Jesus scholars today rightly affirm that Jesus' contemporaries experienced him as a healer. As Bart Ehrman notes, scholars can recognize Jesus as an exorcist and healer without passing judgment on whether he acted supernaturally.

Virtually all substantial ancient sources about Jesus, including those from his detractors, recognize that his contemporaries experienced him as a healer. This is true of all the layers most often postulated in the gospel tradition: Mark, Q, John, special M, and special L. Josephus probably

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views Jesus partly in these terms. Later rabbis and the pagan thinker Celsus acknowledge that Jesus performed healings but attribute them to sorcery. Compared to most other accounts of healers from antiquity (as opposed to healing shrines), the earliest reports are remarkably close in time to the events reported—many from within a generation.

Some multiply-attested reports of his activity appear particularly dramatic, including healing blindness, resuscitating some dead persons, and on rare occasions what modern scholars call nature miracles.

**Strauss and Bultmann**

David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) rightly reacted against the implausible naturalistic explanations of Jesus's miracles offered in some earlier studies about Jesus, such as Jesus's secret Essene medicaments. Strauss did not, however, question the radical Enlightenment's rejection of special divine action on which such explanations were based. Strauss came up with a naturalistic explanation more critically plausible than the strained hypotheses of his predecessors: namely, that our primary sources, the Gospels, were late and unreliable, reporting myths and legends that developed over a period of several generations. Few scholars today would attempt to date the Gospels as late as did Strauss, but some still regard Jesus' dramatic miracles as reflecting mostly legendary developments.

Strauss's own friend Edward Mörike, virtually unable to walk, found himself cured after visiting the Lutheran pastor Johann Christoph Blumhardt, who was known for a ministry of healing and deliverance. Not surpr...
prisingly, Strauss dismissed the healing as psychosomatic. Interestingly, however, he did not attribute it to legendary accretion developed over the course of generations.

In contrast to Karl Barth, who highly respected Blumhardt, Bultmann dismissed stories of cures surrounding Blumhardt as legend. Today, however, using journals and letters, historians have shown that reports of dramatic cures, including those that contemporaries believed to be raisings from the dead, do go back to eyewitnesses of Blumhardt’s ministry, often written immediately after the experiences.

**WIDESPREAD MIRACLE BELIEFS AND CLAIMS**

Bultmann dismissed the need to argue against miracles by claiming that no one in the modern world believes in them. By contrast, Justo González retorts that “what Bultmann declares to be impossible is not just possible, but even frequent” in Latino churches. Hwa Yung, Malaysia’s former Methodist bishop, warns that Bultmann’s assumptions about reality are not shared by Christians in Asia. In his Oxford monographs on global Christianity, Philip Jenkins emphasizes that healing, visions, and so forth are greatly valued in the Global South. Even in the West, as many as 80 percent of Americans believe in divine healing.

More relevant are the figures for those who claim to have witnessed divine healing. A Pew Forum survey of 10 countries in 2006 offered

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26 Dieter Ising, Johann Christoph Blumhardt, Life and Work: A New Biography (trans Monty Ledford, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009) 221–22, citing the original correspondence.
27 Strauss did allow for Jesus’s cure of “nervous” disorders (so John Wilson, “The Miracles of the Gospels,” *American Journal of Theology* 9 [1905] 10–33, here, p 13), and so presumably would have regarded this case as analogous.
34 Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 107.
percentages that, translated into hard numbers, suggest that in these 10 countries alone, and among Pentecostals and charismatics alone, some 200 million believe that they have witnessed divine healing.\(^{36}\) Another finding of the survey seems even more surprising: 39 percent of Christians who do \emph{not} claim to be Pentecostal or charismatic \emph{also} claim to have witnessed divine healing.\(^{37}\) Another 2008 Pew Forum study concluded that 34 percent of Americans claim to have witnessed divine healing.\(^{38}\)

These claims are not limited to Christians, although I draw especially from Christian claims in this article. Indeed, until recently anthropologists have focused almost exclusively on non-Christian claims.\(^{39}\) Extraordinary

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\(^{37}\) "Sprit and Power" (p 3 of overview)


reports from any similar religious contexts remain relevant for the point of historical analogy; how one approaches them theologically is a different question not relevant to the primary question at hand in this article.\(^{40}\)

The point here is not what proportion of anomalous healing claims involve divine activity; even the most ardent theist would not propose that explanation for all these claims. The point—whether arguing for the possibility of miracles or more simply, as here, for historical plausibility of analogous experiences—is whether human experience regarding spontaneous healing in theistic contexts is as uniformly negative as Hume, Strauss, or Bulmann assumed.\(^{41}\)

**Experiences That Convince Non-Christians**

As in the Gospels and Acts, not everyone interprets these experiences in the same way.\(^ {42}\) Nevertheless, it is not only those who begin with Christian presuppositions who find these experiences convincing.\(^ {43}\) Many, in fact,
have found them so convincing that they have changed their religious allegiances and often centuries of ancestral traditions on account of them.

As in the Gospels and Acts, these experiences appear to be reported most often, though not exclusively, in settings where the Christian message about Jesus is spreading in areas with the least historic exposure to it.44 China was not listed in the survey of 10 countries mentioned above, but a decade ago researchers estimated that between half and 90 percent of all conversions to Christian faith in the previous two decades stemmed from "faith healing experiences."45 Although we lack means to verify any precise percentage, even the lowest estimates refer to millions of people.

Non-Christians also have affirmed Christian healings in India. For example, one survey already in 1981 concluded that one-tenth of non-Christians in Chennai "had experienced an important cure through prayer to Jesus."46 One of my own students from north India noted that his Baptist church had grown perhaps 100 times over due to healings of non-Christians in answer to prayer, and there were many other non-Christians healed who appreciated the church but for social reasons did not join it.47 Similarly, a predominantly Hindu area in Nickerie, Suriname that had long resisted the Christian message experienced a people movement with tens of thousands of converts after a well-known, aged skeptic was instantly healed of lifelong paralysis.48

These experiences are not new. Irenaeus reports in his day nearly the same range of miracles that appear in the Gospels and Acts, noting that these

Linda L. Barnes and Susan S. Sered; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Edith Turner, Among the Healers: Stories of Spiritual and Ritual Healing Around the World (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006). Nevertheless, I have limited space to explore these issues here, and the Christian claims were most accessible to me.


46. Bergunder, Movement, 233 (Chennai was then called Madras).

47. Pastor S. Israel, Wynnewood, PA, November 2, 1997, and May 6, 1998. I have received accounts on the same subject from many other students or acquaintances from India, for example, Alex Abraham, interview, Irving, TX, October 29, 2009; Ebenezer Perinbaraj, Wilmore, KY, December 25, 2012.

were converting many pagans. Tertullian provides names of well-known non-Christians cured from hostile spirits through Christian prayers. Yale historian Ramsay MacMullen notes that the primary reasons for conversion to Christianity in the 300s were exorcisms and healings.

NOT ONLY FROM THE SCIENTIFICALLY NAIVE

Starting philosophic assumptions shape how miracle claims are interpreted, and an inflexible naturalist may always claim that even the least plausible naturalistic interpretation is more plausible than a supernatural interpretation. Within the Gospels themselves, responses to healings of various sorts diverged widely. Nevertheless, some of these experiences are dramatic enough that they invite special consideration as unusual even from many of those trained, as many of us have been, in methodological naturalism.

A 2004 survey of 1,100 physicians in the United States concluded that 73 percent of doctors believe that miracles such as those in the Bible “can occur today.” More significantly, in the context of this question, more than half of doctors also reported seeing “treatment results in their patients that they would consider miraculous.”

Medical journals rarely include these experiences because scientific journals address especially what is replicable, and purported miracles, as experiences within history, are neither replicable nor completely predictable. (This limitation may be appropriate, restricting scientific inquiry to the scientific method; problems arise only when other useful epistemic approaches are deemed invalid.) Moreover, unusual events that are reported are normally reported as anomalies, not linked with theistic contexts that patients often unfortunately do not even share with their doctors. This is not, however, to deny that any documentation of this sort exists.

49. Kelsey, Healing, 150–51 (citing Irenaeus Her. 2.6.2; 2.10.4; 2.31.2; 2.32.4–5; 3.5.2); see much more fully R. J. S. Barrett-Lennard, Christian Healing after the New Testament: Some Approaches to Illness in the Second, Third, and Fourth Centuries (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994) 89–135.
53. See “Science or Miracle,” summarizing results of a survey by HCD Research and the Louis Finkelstein Institute for Religious and Social Studies of The Jewish Theological Seminary (Online: http://www.hcdi.net/News/PressRelease.cfm?ID=47 [accessed September 12, 2014]).
55. On patients not sharing these experiences with their doctors, see, e.g., Margaret M. Poloma, The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989) 57; Jacalyn Duffin, Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints, and Healing in the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 131; I have often noticed this frustrating pattern in my interviews.
The Medical Bureau at Lourdes has been most rigorous in documenting the sort of healings known to happen onsite. Although much more sporadically, because conditions outside specific locations are less predictable, doctors have sometimes offered medical evidence supporting healings in other religious contexts. Thus, for example, Dr. Rex Gardner, former President of the Newcastle and Northern Counties Medical Society, published case studies regarding anomalous healings that he deemed miraculous, both in a medical journal article and also a book. One case, for example, was the spontaneous healing, in the context of prayer, of a girl's deafness that was due to auditory nerve damage.

Many witnesses have attested the healings of large numbers of deaf people in Jesus' name in previously completely unchurched villages in Mozambique. These healings usually lead directly to the planting of churches in these communities that knew the prior and subsequent conditions of the people healed. Researchers documented that a significant proportion of people who received prayer there moved immediately from what would constitute legal deafness or blindness to hearing and sight. Although critics rightly pointed out the limitations of testing conditions in Mozambique, the explanation of the research in a more recent study demonstrates dramatic changes in the subjects' auditory and visual acuity.

Other cases include Lisa Larios, a teenager dying from a degenerative disease who was suddenly healed during a religious service; testing showed that even her previously degenerated bones had been restored. Medical documentation shows that Bruce van Natta's mostly destroyed small intestine more than doubled in length after a prayer of faith. Non-yem Numbere, a medical doctor, attests the healing of a fractured spine.


59 In addition to published accounts, witnesses include Kathy Evans (personal correspondence, November 10, 2008), Shelley Hollis (phone interview, January 10, 2009), recently, see Wendy J. Deichmann, "Lessons from Mozambique," *Good News* (2015/1) 20-22 (here, p. 20)


62 H. Richard Casdorph, *The Miracles: A Medical Doctor Says Yes to Miracles* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1976) 25-33, although the book's level is popular, the author (an MD and PhD) includes the medical documentation

63 Medical documentation received September 26, 2014, from Joel Lantz and Bruce van Natta
during a worship service. Tonye Briggs, also a medical doctor, provided his eyewitness testimony of a deep and oozing wound healing fully overnight after prayer, preempting the planned amputation.

In 2006, Carl Cocherell broke his ankle and was told that he would need months of therapy. He experienced God speaking to him and telling him that his foot was not broken, and the two radiology reports, one week apart, show that the fracture had disappeared without a single trace. Likewise, Joy Wahnefried, whose vertical heterophoria was such a classic case of the condition that her portrait graced a brochure advertising the condition, was healed as a fellow college student prayed for her. Although from her doctor's worldview this cure was merely a previously unattested anomaly, no one questioned the cure's genuineness, which had to be medically verified to remove the visual impairment restriction on her driver's license. Many other accounts are likewise documented medically.

**EYEWITNESSES' ACCOUNTS**

Although doctors' reports are particularly helpful for attesting a significant change in health, 1st-century reports lack this sort of attestation. Physicians are uniquely competent to evaluate the etiology of diseases and cures, not addressed here, but for the historical argument from analogy, it is sufficient that eyewitnesses whose integrity we have strong reason to trust attest witnessing or experiencing cures in religiously charged contexts.

Eyewitness testimony counts as a form of evidence in sociology, anthropology, history, journalism, and law. For most events, such as traffic accidents, we would weigh more heavily a normally trustworthy...
eyewitness's claim about the event than the skepticism of a larger number of nonwitnesses who were not present at the event. Granted, various factors may distort the precision of memory, but a consistent core usually remains, especially in memorably significant events. The accounts in this article include both some memories preserved over several decades, perhaps relevant to Mark's Gospel (usually dated four decades after Jesus' ministry), and accounts offered at the time of their occurrence.

Although examples of miracle claims could be multiplied, preference is given to particular kinds below. Because Hume's now-traditional argument against miracle claims questioned the sufficiency of witnesses' integrity, I focus especially on respected witnesses with something to lose. Because sources closest to eyewitnesses on average risk fewer layers of secondary elaboration, I give somewhat greater preference here to witnesses whose integrity I personally know or witnesses I have at least interviewed, allowing me to raise questions and observe responses.

Some ancient Christian writers such as Origen claimed to have witnessed healings. For a time, Augustine doubted that cures resembling those in the Gospels and Acts continued in his day, but he was present when his friend Innocent was healed of a painful fistula after prayer. Just two years after beginning to collect documents attesting healings in Hippo alone, Augustine reported 70 cases, not including those not yet formally documented. Some of these were dramatic, including raisings and cures of inability to walk.

As noted earlier, respectable eyewitnesses also abound today, even for some cures at least as dramatic as most reported in the Gospels. Thus, for example, a number of people report witnessing the instant disappearance of goiters. Among them, scholars Wonsuk and Julie Ma report praying for a woman dying from a toxic goiter; they and others present witnessed the goiter's immediate disappearance. Wonsuk, a Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible, is


71 Cels 1 46, 67, in Kelsey, Healing, 136

72 See Aug City of God 22 8, Conf 9 4 12, see discussion, e.g., in Nathan M Herum, "Augustine's Theology of the Miraculous" (M Div thesis, Beeson Divinity School, 2009)

73 Julie C Ma, Mission Possible The Biblical Strategy for Reaching the Lost (Regnum Studies in Mission, Eugene, OR Wipf & Stock, 2005) 65-66 Some other reports of visibly and instantly
executive director of the Oxford Center for Mission Studies, where Julie, a Ph.D. in missiology, is research tutor.

My close friend Danny McCain, a religion professor at the University of Jos, witnessed the complete healing of his younger brother's skin from severe burns during a time of prayer.\(^4\) Near 1980, I myself involuntarily witnessed an anomalous event that most of those present regarded as divine healing. I had been helping with an evening Bible study at Rose Lane Nursing Home, where Barbara, always bound to her wheelchair, regularly complained about her inability to walk. One evening a middle-aged seminarian named Don took her by the hand and commanded her to rise and walk in the name of Jesus. She looked as horrified as I felt, but he walked her around the room, and from then on, Barbara began to walk, quite proudly.\(^7\)

Due to space constraints, I survey below some examples from just a few categories of anomalies, especially of the sort immediately evident to observers and thus most likely to be dismissed through the traditional scholarly use of the analogy argument.

**CURES OF BLINDNESS**

Multiple attestation supports the tradition that Jesus cured blindness.\(^7\) Whatever the explanations offered for such cures,\(^7\) they continue to be claimed by witnesses in religious contexts today.

Hundreds of claims of divinely cured blindness are available,\(^7\) but I will cite only a few examples here. Dr. Rex Gardner reports a case of restored sight through prayer so complete that the man no longer even needed the glasses he had been wearing for 12 years before his accident.\(^8\) When a medical trainee was healed of a deadly disease, Gardner notes, even her eye scarring disappeared, an event the physicians deemed extraordinary.\(^9\)

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\(^4\) Danny McCain, personal correspondence, June 1, 2009, interview, Wilmore, July 17, 2011, further details in personal correspondence, November 24 and 30, 2014 A doctor, Mirtha Venero Boza, also attests witnessing serious burns disappear during prayer, in her case it took half an hour (interview, Santiago de Cuba, August 6, 2010)

\(^7\) My younger brother Christopher Keener, now a Ph D in physics, also witnessed this occasion (personal correspondence, January 30 and February 8, 2009)


\(^7\) E.g., Donald Capps, *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist* (Louisville, KY Westminster John Knox, 2008) 8, 57–80, suggests that the blindness could have been psychogenic in character, cf Davies, *Healer*, 70–72

\(^7\) See my *Miracles*, 510–23

\(^7\) Gardner, *Healing Miracles*, 31–35 Many others could be included, such as the healing and restoration to sight of a punctured eye, as in Paul P Parker, "Suffering, Prayer, and Miracles," *Journal of Religion and Health* 36 (1997) 205–19 (here, p 216)

\(^8\) Gardner, *Healing Miracles*, 20–21 On the disappearance of scar tissue in another case of healed blindness, see Allen Spraggett, *Kathryn Kuhlman The Woman Who Believes in Miracles*
Many witnesses report the visible disappearance of white eye coatings or cataracts during prayer. In 2004, Flint McGlaughlin, now director of Enterprise Research at the Transforming Business Institute, Cambridge University, prayed for a blind man in India who could see only shadows. The man's eyes suddenly cleared, and he began shouting that he could see; for days, he walked around joyfully pondering everything around him.

Accounts abound in Africa. For example, I received several reports of miracles from Cameroonian Baptist pastor Paul Mokake, previously my M.Div. student and afterward a D.Min. student at the same seminary. When another M.Div. student close to our family, Yolanda McCain, was visiting Cameroon, she personally witnessed a blind man receive sight when Paul prayed for him, an encounter that Paul confirmed afterward when I inquired.

Dr. Bungishabaku Katho, president of Shalom University in Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo, notes that in 1993 he and his coworkers, who were evangelizing some villages, prayed for an elderly blind woman. After about two minutes she began shouting that she could see, and she remained sighted for the rest of her life, another decade.

Accounts of this sort also appear in the United States, where medical documentation is easier to obtain. Suffering from macular degeneration, Greg Spencer was on disability; his vision was 20/400 in the right eye and 20/200 in the left. On April 20, 2002, he was praying for cleansing of his mind from horrible images related to his past work investigating crimes, when he experienced not only a cleansing of his mind, which he deems the greater miracle, but a sudden restoration of his sight (to the level of 20/30). Medical reports attest "a remarkable return of his visual acuity." Because macular degeneration does not normally reverse, the Social Security Administration launched a lengthy investigation but concluded that he was in fact restored, free to work, and no longer qualified for disability.

(Cleveland: World, 1970) 71-75, 137; and especially the details in Wayne E. Warner, Kathryn Kuhlman: The Woman behind the Miracles (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1993) 132-34.


82. Flint McGlaughlin, personal correspondence, February 6-7, 2009; confirmed by another eyewitness, Robin Shields, personal correspondence, February 7-8, 2009.

83. Interviews, Wynnewood, PA, June 3, 2006; May 13, 2009.


85. Bungishabaku Katho, interview, Wynnewood, PA, March 12, 2009. He belongs to Assemblée des Frères Evangélique, the Western equivalent of which has traditionally questioned continuing miracles.

86. Medical reports from July 1, 1999; May 3, 2002; letter from the Social Security Administration, dated June 12, 2003.
Multiple attestation supports the belief that Jesus sometimes raised the dead. An argument from analogy technically cannot undermine this claim because subsequent history reports numerous cases of persons believed dead reviving, including a quite significant number in the context of direct prayer. John Wesley, for example, prayed for one Mr. Meyrick, who was believed dead, and the latter revived.

Scores of accounts of these resuscitations appear today as well, and again I offer samples here. Among many reports from Indonesia, Yusuf Herman, a minister and friend from Indonesia, connected me with his friend Dominggus whose neck had been cut. Journalists' photographs in my possession attest Dominggus's apparently dead condition, but he is now alive. Although his neck required medical intervention, once doctors realized that he was now alive, and although Dominggus still bears the scars, he recounts a postmortem experience before his return to life.

According to the General Secretary of Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia, Assayehegn Berhe, raisings often occur in Ethiopia. Because of three summers in Nigeria and my wife's being from Congo-Brazzaville, we know well some people who have experienced what are believed to be resuscitations. Two of my coworkers in Nigeria attest raisings, one after praying for "a few hours" until a corpse revived and another himself reviving about nine hours after his fatal accident, most of the time spent in a morgue. We interviewed several eyewitnesses of resuscitations in the context of prayer in the mainline Protestant church of Congo-Brazzaville, including my mother-in-law, who reports that she detected no breathing

93. Leo Bawa, personal correspondence, August 10, 2009; Timothy Olonade, personal correspondence, May 12, 22, 2014; interview, February 20, 2015.
for three hours in my sister-in-law until a minister friend prayed. After I shared some of these reports in an SBL session, suggesting that listening to Majority World voices could help us better appreciate such accounts in the Gospels, Dr. Ayo Adewuya, an IBR member, shared his own account of his son's resuscitation after half an hour of prayer.

Researchers attribute the beginning of a people movement among the Nishi tribal people in northeast India to the resuscitation through prayer of an official's son. Two Western sociologists interviewed local eyewitnesses elsewhere in India, including non-Christians, who attested resuscitations through Christian prayer. A pastor from Mumbai shared with me the resuscitation of a Hindu boy, Vikram, after more than an hour of prayer. I interviewed a coworker in the Philippines who gave me her own account of being resuscitated in 1984 immediately after a Baptist minister's prayer for her in the morgue. Dr. Mervin Ascabano also reports a resuscitation there in 2009, although after a much briefer interval.

In the West, Deborah Watson, my colleague in Greek at my previous seminary, recounted the resuscitation of her younger sister, elaborated for me more fully by Deborah's father. Cardiologist Chauncey Crandall reports his own experience with the resuscitation of Jeff Markin after 40 minutes with no heart activity. Similarly, Sean George, a consultant physician in Kalgoorlie, Australia, attests his own extraordinary resuscitation and recovery, albeit more gradually and with more medical help, and has the medical documentation.

Irreparable brain damage sets in after six minutes with no oxygen, but none of these cases yielded brain damage. My wife or I know 10 eyewitnesses well enough directly to trust their testimony; if one case is merely

97. Miller and Yamamori, Pentecostalism, 151–52. The sociologists themselves are not Pentecostal.
100. Mervin Ascabano, correspondence, January 9, 2009; February 6, 2009.
an anomaly, the compounding of 10 anomalies in our immediate circle—the compounding of improbabilities 10 times over—seems remarkably anomalous.\textsuperscript{104} Granted that mistakes in detecting death are made, one might choose to argue the same for the biblical accounts; that is, the experiences are believable regardless of the explanations we assign to them, even if we allow for multiple cases in the same circle.

**Nature Miracles**

Accounts of nature miracles are less frequent than many other kinds of accounts, but they are more common than most of us in the West would expect. Here again, I offer samples.\textsuperscript{105} Thus, for example, some citizens of one village challenged the Christian witness of a young Watchman Nee and his colleagues, claiming that for 286 years it had never rained on the scheduled day of their local god’s festival. Because one of the Christians announced that this year would be different, the team prayed concertedly, and torrential rain ruined the festival on both its original and rescheduled dates, leading to many conversions.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} For example, if one might estimate the probability of this sort of anomaly in the immediate circle of one’s family as 1 in 10 (a rather generous estimate if exorbitant numbers of people are not being buried prematurely), the probability of 10 of these anomalies would be 1 in 10 billion, so that one would not expect this sort of concidence more than once in the world’s population Add to this the concidence that I happened to write a book on the subject, and it appears to me that the explanation of mere concidence is grossly improbable, a grasping at straws But some will nevertheless deem it a better explanation than the alternatives


\textsuperscript{106} See Angus Knirear, Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1978) 92–96 Miracle accounts are far more characteristic of Nee’s contemporary John
Emmanuel Itapson, who was my colleague in Hebrew Bible at Palmer Seminary, recounts an experience he witnessed in his youth. Ridiculed in the village where he was trying to establish a church, Emmanuel's father, Anana Itap, angrily warned that it would not rain in the village for the next four days. As his critics left laughing, Itap fell on his face, fearing that he had gone too far. It was, after all, rainy season. For the next four days, rain poured down around the village, but none inside it. At the end of those four days, only one person in the village had not become a Christian, and the local people still relate this account of how it became a Christian village.107

In addition to some students and colleagues who offered me eyewitness accounts of nature miracles,108 I myself was present when a storm, predicted to continue all day, stopped within seconds of a group's prayer for it to stop.109

**CONCLUSION**

However explained, surveys suggest that hundreds of millions of people today claim to have witnessed what they consider divine healing. Moreover, millions of people with different starting assumptions have changed centuries of ancestral allegiances on the basis of such experiences. As in the gospel tradition, these experiences do include even healing of blindness, resuscitation of some dead persons through prayer, and occasionally what their reporters consider nature miracles. Some experiences even go beyond the gospel tradition in reporting instant or nearly instant visible changes such as vanishing goiters.

Scholars will continue to debate the reasons for such experiences. That even firsthand witnesses can claim to experience them, however, should not be denied. The traditional argument from analogy against cures occurring in Jesus's ministry was designed in a different era, with quite-different information available from what we have available today.

Reports such as these may challenge conventional skepticism concerning the cures in the Gospel accounts. Depending on how they are understood, some experiences might also be used to support challenges to Hume's presumption against sufficient credible witnesses regarding genuine miracles. For the purposes of this essay, however, what matters is that, to whatever explanations scholars attribute these experiences, "legend-

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Sung (see, e.g., John Sung, *The Diaries of John Sung: An Autobiography* [trans. Stephen L. Sheng; Brighton, MI: Sheng and Sheng, 1995]), but Nee's account appears here because it is a weather miracle report.

107. Emmanuel Itapson, interview, April 29, 2008; phone interview, December 15, 2009. They belong to the evangelical West African denomination ECWA, connected with SIM.

108. E.g., Sandy Thomas (August 26, 2008); Ayodeji Adwuya (November 22, 2009; December 14, 2009); Paul Mokake (June 3, 2006; May 13, 2009); Donna Arukua (January 29, 2009); Benjamin Ahanonu (September 29, 2009; confirmed by another witness, Simon Hauger, phone interview, December 4, 2009).

109. Personal journal, November 6, 1993 (written the day that I witnessed the event).
ary accretion" is not a necessary assumption even for the most dramatic miracle reports. The presence of these reports in the Gospels, then, does not compel the assumption that the Jesus tradition must have developed wildly in the decades before the Evangelists began writing. Those who wish to make this sort of case should not include the analogy argument against miracles in their arsenal.
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